



# The World Food Programme: augmenting logistics

by Peter Scott-Bowden

*There are two distinct categories of emergencies – those for which you are prepared and others for which you are not.*

As response teams take stock of unfolding news and events, humanitarian agencies have to plan for emergencies in an extraordinary range of operating environments and geographical locations. Planners who focus on logistical challenges are often in a better position to provide effective assistance.

With operations in over 80 countries, the World Food Programme (WFP) has become one of the largest providers of assistance to both refugees and IDPs. Whilst acknowledging that there is no common definition of logistics, augmenting logistics is about providing extra resources to meet operational requirements. Over the years WFP has developed both preparedness and response measures for supporting and augmenting its operations.

## ALITE

Over the last eight years, WFP has developed a specialised unit to augment its field operations with a variety of support services. The Augmented Logistics Intervention Team for Emergencies (ALITE)<sup>1</sup> is specifically tasked with addressing logistical preparedness as well as providing key operational support during emergencies. This includes developing logistics capacity assessments, rapid

response equipment, standby arrangements, civil military cooperation guidance and inter-agency work on the UN Joint Logistics Centre concept.<sup>2</sup>

ALITE strengthens WFP logistics activities by working closely with field logisticians and programme, resource, telecommunications and procurement officers to apply standby capacities, develop operational plans and, where necessary, design special intervention projects. ALITE's goal is to provide a range of rapid and effective emergency services to support WFP field operations, primarily through increased resource availability. It is also responsible for the operational management of the UN Humanitarian Response Depot (UNHRD) in Brindisi, Italy. This facility is used by both UN agencies and NGOs to store programme supplies available for immediate distribution to beneficiaries and operational support equipment for responding agencies and NGOs.

WFP often needs to establish its own infrastructure for field operations including offices, warehouses and all the equipment for a supply chain system. In such circumstances, the Country Office can augment its own operation by drawing on reserves stored in UNHRD and can build up the

infrastructure to establish both operations at the country office and sub-office levels. The pre-fabricated buildings are flat-packed and pre-wired and come with office equipment and sleeping quarters. One Hercules C-130 can transport about six of these 'packs' – and while a forklift is preferable at the destination it is not essential.

In addition, WFP has now built up its own ICT support unit named FITTEST (Fast Information Technology and Telecommunications Emergency Support Team). Besides its work for WFP, FITTEST provides a growing role in the provision of inter-agency secure telecommunications. Recent deployments of equipment include those during the large-scale emergencies in Afghanistan and Iraq.

In the past three years, WFP has carried out extensive work to strengthen its logistical preparedness and capacity. The overall goal has been to improve rapid response facilities so as to allow timely delivery of food aid in both sudden- and slow-onset emergency situations.

## Augmentation through partnership

To complement its emergency response, WFP has developed agreements over the years with 'standby' partner organisations – organisations that it can call on to guarantee additional capacity in key vulnerable regions. These agreements have been updated with a view to streamlining

the approach and procedures to be followed whenever standby partners are deployed. This is becoming increasingly pertinent to issues such as war risk insurance and liability/indemnification and associated responsibilities.

The standby partners can be classified into three categories: governmental entities, NGOs and donors from the private sector. They may provide individual experts and/or deployed service packages which comprise both staff and equipment. Opposite is a table which illustrates some of the service package deployments made since 1999.

While most agreements have focused on logistical expertise, some standby partners also have members on their rosters with expertise in other skills such as needs assessment, food security, nutrition, security and mine awareness/clearance. WFP can deploy such assets fast, having developed Standard Deployment Procedures (SDPs) with its partners. More importantly, WFP has built relationships of trust and mutual understanding. Training is critical to this success, along with joint evaluations of past deployments.

Because of the diversity of areas and complexity of environments in which WFP is called upon to make interventions, ALITE is frequently asked to develop the means to support WFP's core operational mandate through collaborative partnerships. For example, the Swiss Foundation for Mine Action (FSD - Fondation Suisse de Deminage) provided expert advice and technical assistance to WFP. It undertook mine risk education for staff (both theory and practical training exercises) and demonstrated the impact that mine awareness can have on WFP operations. This effort, in coordination with the UN Mine Action Service, played a crucial role in securing transport corridors as well as clearing offices and warehouses for WFP during the early months of the Iraq operation in 2003.

During the 2001-2002 Afghan emergency, a mountaineering and avalanche control team from CARE Canada contributed to major efforts to keep the Salang Tunnel open. This team prevented avalanches of snow and ice from blocking vital supply routes into remote areas in Afghanistan. Such interventions

Standby support to WFP Ops 1999 - 2003	Country/region (list not comprehensive)
Base camp (office, living accommodation)	Afghanistan, Kosovo, East Timor, Mozambique, Iraq
Telecommunications teams	Balkans, East Timor, Iraq
Mobile bakery	Albania, Kosovo
Boat teams	Mozambique
Avalanche control unit	Afghanistan
NBC <sup>3</sup> training teams	Iraq, UAE, Cyprus, Kuwait
Mine Action teams	Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Iraq, Sri Lanka, Sudan
Trucking fleets	Afghanistan, Balkans, Palestinian Territories, Eritrea, Zambia, Malawi, Lesotho
Road and bridge rehabilitation teams	Angola, Afghanistan, Sierra Leone, Turkmenistan

enabled WFP and other humanitarian agencies to transport crucial supplies to those stranded by the conflict. One additional positive outcome was that it stimulated the reactivation of the local economy through opening transport routes and the movement of people displaced by years of war.

Other examples include:

- rescue boat operators deployed in Mozambique to assist in flood relief efforts
- Swedish Rescue Services Agency international convoy teams deployed in Kosovo, Afghanistan and the Palestinian Territories
- ICT support teams (from the Norwegian Refugee Council and Danish Refugee Council) deployed in most regions, working closely with WFP's FITTEST team, co-ordinated in Dubai
- UK's Department for International Development air operations specialists
- Red R Australia logistics officers deployed in Iraq
- Swiss Humanitarian Assistance engineers deployed for road and infrastructure rehabilitation
- TPG experts deployed to assist in air support of operations in southern Sudan.

### Private sector partners

In meeting the challenge of developing new business processes, WFP has taken the initiative of building relationships with the private sector. This involves examining ways in which the private sector can assist WFP in meet-

ing its challenge of feeding people across the world. Although not all businesses are a paradigm for effective practice, WFP receives support from organisations such as TPG - the Dutch-based international mail, express and logistics company (previously known as the TNT Post Group).<sup>4</sup>

TPG, through its TNT logistics division, initially identified three short-term logistics areas where it could support WFP. The UNHRD warehouse (soon to accommodate other agencies) needs to grow significantly. TPG will support its expansion and analyse its efficiency and effectiveness in order to determine optimal layout and stock availability. TPG is also looking at a number of smaller projects, including evaluating warehouse management systems, assessing the global warehouse infrastructure and determining key logistics performance indicators.

TPG also played a significant support role in the southern Africa emergency operation as well as more recently in the Iraq operation. However the relationship is not just about moving supplies between A and B; it is perhaps more importantly about forging greater links and understanding between commercial experts and those within the public sector, and about exchanging ideas, practices and new business concepts. One of the first private sector companies to provide surge capacity support was Ericsson with the deployment of a telecommunications team to Afghanistan, which provided mobile

telecommunications not only for WFP but also for the other emergency relief agencies operating there.

Drawing on the success of the UNHRD model, WFP is now developing a 'four-corner' concept in collaboration with TPG. This will involve establishing strategic response depots to cover the four quarters of the world. The centres will provide storage capacity and act as staging areas for response. This concept does not necessarily involve large stockpiles; much of the stocking will be 'virtual' - with the focus on rapid local procurement capability. WFP and UNHCR have also agreed shared access to each agency's 'Long Term Agreements' with suppliers, increasing procurement capabilities. WFP aims to draw upon both commercial and public sectors, and is in close contact with IFRC and UNICEF who are developing similar modules and strategies.

### Lessons learned

Recent feedback from standby partners (in the Afghanistan operation) and internal discussions have highlighted a number of issues for WFP to tackle:

- For new standby partners, WFP must provide clearer, more transparent overall guidelines of operation. In a large-scale emergency, partners have to learn fast. WFP has in the past provided complex, generic training tools. Training and learning tools must, however, be simple and specific to the operation.
- WFP - as other agencies - deploys staff/partners to increasingly insecure areas yet has few medical/safety experts to support those deployed. This needs to be addressed.
- WFP's capacity for learning lessons from field operations needs to be enhanced. The military conduct rigorous 'lessons learned' exercises

and WFP could learn from their approach.

- WFP could learn much from the commercial sector in terms of knowledge transfer.
- WFP's donors have recently demanded greater operational coordination. WFP has responded by developing a competencies matrix of its standby partners which has proved extremely helpful. In Iraq, one third of the emergency personnel deployed in support of the WFP operation came from among the 15 standby partners. Without detailed knowledge of their capabilities, this would not have been possible. While WFP continues to address this issue, it is also asking the same question of the donors - coordination is required on both sides.

### Continuing challenges

- **Integrated planning:** Contingency planning is successful when it is an integrated undertaking to identify gaps and requirements in the supply chain process. Building relationships with partners takes investment - in time and money. It must be done thoroughly with clear parameters and procedures. Fast response demands trust, especially when security is an issue.
- **Capacity building:** WFP avoids bringing into a region 'outside' transport assets wherever there is indigenous capacity. Increasing efforts are being made to support sustainability and when the operation is nearing completion, 'transition strategies' are implemented to support transfer of knowledge and skills to those organisations and entities staying behind. Much more needs to be done. The next major challenge for the 'Northern' NGOs and agencies alike is to expand their network and invest in building flexible structures within regions.

Frequently, at huge cost, assets are flown half way around the world to supply urgent supplies.

Questions should be asked about the cost benefit of such strategic responses. Donors too should question their own 'justification' for such deployments. Augmenting logistics should maximise the tenet 'small investment, large gain' and do all it can to develop regional capacities. Such relationships can yield benefits for the donors through efficient utilisation of their resources and can also build links with and between Southern countries.

- **Public versus commercial sector:** Agencies will have to be careful, at the beginning of each relationship, to agree ethical practices and to clarify which areas of their work require support/involvement and which do not. It should be recognised that both commercial organisations and relief agencies will have their own agendas - and their own accountability requirements. Though they may share areas of commitment to humanitarian needs, the commercial versus humanitarian principles need careful examination and navigation. And relief workers need to be persuaded that commercial practices can be useful. How do we encourage the 'we have always done it this way' person to adapt to new technologies/methods?

Within the humanitarian community, as within the corporate sector, 'logistics' may be redefining itself. Supply chain management with concrete data - on what is available or what is not - may improve programme allocation and in turn maximise benefits for beneficiaries. Equally, developing an integrated approach helps to bridge divides within and between organisations.

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1. ALITE was established in 1995 by Ramiro Lopes da Silva (current Humanitarian Coordinator for the UN in Iraq) and David Kaatrud, Coordinator, UNJLC. See [www.wfp.org/operations/logistics/contingency\\_planning.html](http://www.wfp.org/operations/logistics/contingency_planning.html)
2. See article on UNJLC on pp11
3. Nuclear, Biological and Chemical training.
4. See [www.tpg.com/wwwenglish/community/movingtheworld/](http://www.tpg.com/wwwenglish/community/movingtheworld/)



*UN convoys in Afghanistan are preceded by snow-clearing teams and/or an Avalanche Control Unit, provided by Canadian standby partners.*